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School Committee Minutes 11-12-2002

ARLINGTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2002
7:30 PM

Present: David McKenna, Chair
Suzanne Owayda, Vice Chair
Paul Schlichtman, Secretary
Barbara Goodman

Joani LaMachia
Denis Sullivan
Martin Thrope

Superintendent: Kathleen Donovan
Chief Financial Officer: David Kale
Special Education Director: Marilyn Bisbicos

Absent: Joanne Gurry

Call to Order: 7:40 PM

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

SECRETARY'S REPORT

" Correspondence
Mr. Schlichtman reviewed a letter received from Mr. Charles Foskett, relative to the Phase II school rebuild project.
" On a motion by Mr. Schlichtman and seconded by Ms. Goodman it was unanimously
Voted to approve the regular meeting minutes of October 8, 2002.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Members of the Committee responded to Mr. Thrope's comments and criticisms relative to the budget process and the taping of executive sessions from the meeting of October 22, 2002. The Chair denied Mr. Thrope's request for a point of personal privilege.

APPROVAL OF WARRANTS

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia and seconded by Mr. Sullivan it was unanimously
Voted to approve warrant #03056 in the amount of \$228,451.11 (Mr. Schlichtman noted his abstention on payment to MASC)

On a motion by Ms. Goodman and seconded by Ms. LaMachia it was unanimously
Voted to approve warrant #03062 in the amount of \$777,698.79.

VOTE ON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION APPOINTMENT

The Committee decided to refer the three candidates back to the HRC for review since some candidates may be eligible to serve under a different board. The Committee will vote on an appointment at the next meeting (November 26th).

MINORITY HIRING REPORT

Gus Martinson, Human Resource Officer gave a presentation on the current hiring process in APS and reviewed for the Committee:

" The Hiring Process guide

- .. The Report on Minority Hiring
- .. A sample of the APS Resume Database
- .. The APS Human Resources web site

In response to Committee Members' inquiries on minority hiring Mr. Martinson explained the steps taken to recruit, steps to be taken, and obstacles which hinder the hiring of minority candidates.

REPORT ON SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Supt. Donovan reported that TM approved the \$158,000.00 reduction in the school budget. Town Officials discussed the anticipated financial difficulties facing the State and Town in FY04. Mr. Shea from the PTBC requested to speak relative to the Dallin School; since there was not time enough the PTBC scheduled an input meeting for Wednesday, November 13, at 7:30 at the Town Hall. Although the Members agreed that the School Committee must take a position on the timing of the construction of the Dallin School, they were not prepared to do so at this time.

9:05 – 9:15 Break

PRIVATE FUNDRAISING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Placed on the next agenda.

SUPERINTENDENT GOALS

Supt. Donovan presented to the School Committee her goals for the year as required by policy. Mrs. Donovan invited members to review them and to contact her with any questions, comments, or suggestions.

PTBC UPDATE

Ms. Owayda reported that Design Partnership of Cambridge, Inc. was hired for the design of the Thompson & Stratton Schools. The PTBC is negotiating the fee for the designs and will vote on it at their next meeting.

Supt. Donovan reported that at the Peirce School they are working towards receiving a temporary occupancy permit. The Superintendent explained that currently the sound levels are being checked along with the requirements for the classroom sinks. In terms of opening the school Mrs. Donovan stated that she would not like to rush things at this point and would like to move prior to the winter break with the official opening for staff and students on January 2, 2003.

On a motion by Ms. Goodman and seconded by Mr. Sullivan it was unanimously

Voted that the School Committee will plan to accept the Peirce School for occupancy on January 2, 2003.

Mr. McKenna urged the Committee to attend the PTBC meeting with town meeting members on Wednesday November 13th at 7:30 pm in the Town Hall. Mr. Shea from the PTBC requested the meeting to discuss the construction concerns relative to the Dallin School.

SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

Budget Subcommittee

Ms. LaMachia reported that the subcommittee discussed the importance of outreach to the school councils, PTO's, community, and staff on the budget process. It was proposed that the School Committee sponsor a Saturday/Sunday workshop to develop a mutually agreeable budget process using the ideas from the subcommittee meeting.

Student Advisory Council

Ms. Owayda reported that the SAC met and discussed the use of breathalyzers at school dances; no decision was made and the issue will be investigated/discussed in the future.

NEW BUSINESS

.. The Committee congratulated Paul Schlichtman on his election as president-elect of the MASC. Ms. Goodman pointed out that as president elect Mr. Schlichtman starts his post as president-elect in January for one year, as president for another year and then serves as past president for one year; in addition APS receives a \$1,000.00 scholarship from MASC.

.. The Performing Arts Dept. is performing a play "Twelfth Night" on November 18th, 20th and 21st.

.. The Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Subcommittee will meet on Monday, November 25th at 7:30pm.

.. Mr. Thrope questioned if the Peirce Tile Project and the report on the Superintendent evaluation would be on the next agenda.

On a motion by Ms. LaMachia seconded by Mr. Sullivan and amended by Mr. Schlichtman it was

Voted that the School Committee explore the use of a facilitator to help the committee work through and address issues that improve the committees' ability to work as a team. 6-0-1 (Mr. Thrope abstained)

On a motion made and seconded it was

Voted to enter executive session for the purpose of negotiations with no further business to be conducted upon the return of open session except to adjourn. RC: Unanimous.

Executive Session 10:30 –10:45 pm.

On a motion by Mr. Sullivan and seconded by Ms. LaMachia it was unanimously
Voted to adjourn @ 10:45 pm.

Submitted by,
Karen Tassone
Committee Secretary

Statement of committee member Suzanne Owayda regarding tape recording of School Committee meetings:

I ran for SC and wanted to become a member of this team for a couple of reasons – first, I was confident that I would be an effective SC member. I try to live my life and teach my children that “to whom much is given, much is expected” – sorry I can not cite the author of that phrase – but I was given a lot from this town and my service on this committee is one of the ways that I can repay that debt.

I also wanted to become a part of this team because when I use to sit in that audience or watch from home I admired the intelligence, the integrity and the commitment to civic duty that was demonstrated, and I thought that I would be honored to work with this group of committed people.

I thought long and hard about whether I had the time, the commitment, the persistence, to be on a board, which is under heavy public scrutiny. I also took into consideration and understood that while I was working to improve the school system for the entire school population, there would be occasions that my own children's education would be negatively impacted. Looking back I think I was a little naïve but I did know enough to expect and be prepared to receive criticism, hear harsh words and opinions directed at me, my colleagues and our school system.

What I did not expect and what I find very distressing is to have my integrity, my honesty, attacked from within this board – I need to state right now for the record that I never met with a quorum to deliberate illegally in violation of the Open Meeting Law. I never participated in any serial phone or serial email deliberation concerning the use of a tape recorder in ES. Again, maybe I am naïve or maybe I choose to spend my time trying to solve REAL ISSUES but I was not even aware that when and why we taped ES was an issue until Marty brought it up at a meeting and then followed up with his letter accusing this committee of violating the Open Meeting law.

In regard to tape recording ES, we have no SC policy, and there is not a legal requirement to tape ES. This information I got from looking at our policy book and the MGL, not from speaking with an attorney or other SC members.

I must also respond to the assertion that we gather in a quorum and meet secretly after our meetings. There are many nights when we are sitting in this stuffy room for 4 – 5 hours, with cameras on recording our every word, which at times can get stressful. If when the meeting is over I want to stand outside, breathe some fresh air and chat with my colleagues for 15 minutes I should be able to do that without being accused of conducting a secret or illegal meeting. Thinking back I can recall talking about the world series, our primary and state elections, things happening in and about town, the sniper shootings in Washington DC, just to name a few. I can also reflect upon and talk about in general terms how the meeting that we just finished went, but I do not talk about and will not deliberate about future agenda items.

I need to respond to Marty's comments at our last meeting and his subsequent letter to the editor in the Arl Advocate. It was not so very long ago when I was sitting in the audience listening to the deliberations on the budget – there was no Budget Subcommittee where I could go listen, learn and have input. I did not get a chance to meet face to face with the Superintendent and ask specific questions about the budget like a group of concerned community members did last spring. The budget process that we went through last spring was more open than any of the previous years when I was a SC observer. The BSC is comprised of the 3 newest members of the SC, yet Marty has chosen to insult and demean our work by calling it fluff. He has had at least eight years head start on Paul and I and six years head start on Joani, why hasn't he chosen to work with his teammates over the years to fix what he calls a flawed process. I would not characterize this process as flawed, but like anything done in the public domain and by committee the process certainly can be improved and I plan to work with this committee to make those improvements.

I have repeatedly used the word team tonight, because that is what we are and how we should be operating. We are a 7 member team, and we are each 1/7th responsible for the final outcome. Not one of us was elected to judge the remaining 6, the only people who can judge us are the voters of this community, if we succeed, we succeed as a team, if we fail we fail as a team. Does that mean we can not disagree, certainly not, we can and should disagree, but we do

not have to be disagreeable. Each and everyone of us must take responsibility and look at our own behavior and reflect upon how to become better board members – I am planning to listen more closely to all motions and to second anything of substance in the hopes that a discussion may lead to new ideas/solutions.

On the other hand, if motions are failing to get a second, or ideas are not met with enthusiasm, then the maker must reflect upon his tone and words chosen to present the motion, it is much easier to get a second if a motion is not made in a disrespectful, demeaning and insulting manner. We were elected to serve on a committee, which at times means one must collaborate with others to generate support for ideas.

We have a huge task ahead of us – we need to figure out how to run this school system with a 4 million dollar shortfall or convince the voters to open up their wallets and make up the difference. If we can not trust each other, support each other through this most difficult time, why should the taxpayor?

While reading through excerpts of “How to be a Better Boardmember” I ran across an expression that stuck with me – it goes “when elephants fight, the grass suffers”. Well we are the elephants – we are the top of this school system, and when we fight it is the children who suffer. We have a choice, are we going to work together and focus on the monumental task ahead to maintain a very good system that many people have worked very hard to improve or are we going to continue to fight over petty issues. I say we let the past go and focus on the future. And as I tell my 9 and 10 year old soccer players – there is no I in TEAM.